# ART AND EDUCATION

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I PERSONALLY feel that without art no education can be really true education; that art should not be only a subject of the curriculum, but should also be a spirit that pervades every subject. With the help of art, I am sure that the young people will have far finer results in their efforts not only to acquire more knowledge but to pass examinations, which passing is regarded as very important by numbers of people.

Art is, in my view, the one influence that will help to build character; and without character how can we call any system "education?" Such education is mere book knowledge; it is knowledge acquired with great difficulty; it is knowledge crammed into the student; and after the examinations, only a very few of the young people remember what

they have written in the examination papers ; even the teachers do not remember. I am sure that very few of us could go up successfully now for the same examinations as we passed years ago. What we have gained is not real knowledge but rather facts learned by heart for the sake of necessity rather than for knowledge.

So far as I have observed, not only in India but throughout the world, I find that young people respond to rhythm, to music, to colour, to everything that is beautiful. Because they respond first to the beautiful, they would rather have art in their education, if it is taught in the right way. But one regrets to have to say that it very often happens that art classes themselves and art rooms are not expressive of art. If art is taught in a creative, enthusiastic, happy way, young people prefer it to any other subject. But they would enjoy every subject if art had a place in every class-room.

From about the age of ten or eleven until about fifteen is really the time when a child is beginning to learn consciously what he learned before the age of seven unconsciously. As has

been said in the ancient scriptures, the best period of a person's life, that period when he is under his mother's influence, is to the age of seven. Madame Monsessori emphasizes the old saying, " Give me a child until he is seven and you can do what you like with him afterwards." Then the pupil considers what is or is not correct; he begins to have certain standards.

Most grown-ups are very particular about form. When they see something that does not appear to be first and foremost good form, they say, " This is something that contradicts art." But we are beginning at the wrong end when we start teaching form. The art teacher may try to make up for the deficiency in form by showing that not every feather is correct in the painting of a peacock. But the impression of the peacock is more important than the actual perfection in form. More important than the peacock is " peacock-ness ". Once we have the spirit, it is easy to learn the form. Many children want to dance, and the grown-ups sometimes say, " Oh ! the tala (rhythm) is not correct." Other things also may be wrong. The child does not care. He dances

to enjoy himself. If he can learn to express himself gracefully, if grace and rhythm are born in his own nature, then very quickly technique will follow. If the child is denied his desire for self-expression, he grows up feeling that something is wrong, he cannot express himself well or quickly because there is something he has not learned in life.

The adult may ask, regarding the Montessori method, "What is all this making of pyramids and working at beads but playing with toys?" But do you not think that all education should be playing at toys, so that nobody could ever tell the moment he is learning? Art can be so much a thing of joy that we never know when we are learning. To be able to learn when we do not know that we are learning should be our ideal.

Through the Montessori system of education children of four and five often know more in geography and history than some of the matriculation students. Some day, perhaps, when they go up for the matriculation examination, they will find it very easy because they have already learned so much. Our own idea, our own imagination of the

capacity and knowledge of young people, is limited. We often think that, as the child does not know, we must teach him this, that or the other, when the child actually knows far more than we think he knows, and can learn far more than we think he can. We know very well with regard to the dance and music that the child can far outshine the adult. Grown-ups sometimes say, "If we had only learned this when we were children!" which is a compliment to the receptivity of youth.

The ages of eleven to thirteen are psychologically very interesting. Not only does the unconsciousness of childhood remain, but the young person is beginning to understand the whys and wherefores of things for himself.

Our difficulty as adults is that we ourselves have not had the education we should have had, and so we do not always know how to help the children. Children are always very particular about one thing: they do not like to be bored. We ourselves detest being bored; but we have become used to it. We think it is part of life, and that we must put up with it. But if a child's English grammar class

does not interest him, he will think it very tiresome. We know we must never be too logical in English, because the moment our English is logical, it is not good English. One must learn English rather through feeling than through literal exactitude. Suppose a boy or girl says, "I do not understand this particular word," we can help him by dramatising the word, as, for example, in playing charades. Suppose a child does not seem able to learn a particular date, say the era of Napoleon, there is an easy way both teacher and pupil may remember by. Through a play or dramatic reading, each one taking a character, dates will be firmly fixed in the mind; from the moment a date is put into dramatic form the child will remember. How interesting such a class could be made. Both the teacher and the students would enjoy it. One of the best ways of making young people interested is to be interested ourselves. How can a teacher expect pupils to be interested if she is looking frequently at the clock and longing for the period to end?

The place of art in education is a very important one. Art will give what no other

subject will give, life and interest, and in this way creative expression will be stimulated.

When we think of developing the power of observation, we take excursions for that purpose, as if the power of observation could not be developed at any other time. Very often the excursions themselves are boring, because the children know that they have to observe, because they must write an essay the next day. A person who paints or dances, the really creative artist, never has to be asked to observe. He is so interested that he instinctively observes. Art helps people to observe. The artist cannot help but observe every little thing along a road. The painter cannot help appreciating a sunset. How many people really know something about the trees and plants in their own garden ? One day, instead of taking children on an excursion to see a Rocks garden, why not surprise them by asking them to tell something about their own gardens ? The young people might be able to write something that the parents and teachers could not.

If a child hears music at the cinema or sees a dance, he comes home and tries to repeat it.

Why should he not do so in school? Why should we divide the home from the school? We think that the moment the home comes in and the school stops, there is no more education. Why could not life in the school be so natural that, when a child had heard a beautiful song, the whole school would wish to hear him? In such an atmosphere, learning would be spontaneous. But the teachers are so concerned with training children to pass examinations that they have no time to make the school really interesting. In our school at Adyar, senior students help to train the younger students. One of the best ways of learning is to teach. If a child knows very little, ask him to teach what he knows to someone who knows less. If we have such commonsense (or perhaps I should say "uncommonsense") ideas in our schools, the atmosphere of happiness and the effectiveness of the school will grow. Why can we not realize that the school exists for the child?

Why do we separate art and life? Why do we forget the application of art to life? Many think that art is a picture hung on the wall. Everyone who is a real artist realizes that art

and life are inseparable. Art is life. Art is the form, the result of life. Form is life expressed, and it will come automatically the moment opportunity for free expression is given in every possible way.

We must take advantage of special aptitudes. It is said that girls are much interested in drama. If a boy is studying animal life in the earlier classes through geography he will want to be a lion or a tiger. Let him be it. He will pass the examinations very quickly indeed if he learns through stories and drama.

In such ways we can bring art into every subject, and we can make every part of the curriculum really interesting; we can make learning a game. There is some peculiar psychological element in our nature that makes us rebel the moment we are told that we have to do a certain thing.

The child is nearest to all that is natural, unconscious, free, happy; he loves all that is beautiful. The child is nearest to Divinity. What is the expression of God? It is life; creativeness. God has created you and me; and the little Gods can create very beautiful things. Our children are the little Gods; and

if we can release the spirit which is in them we will find that, no matter what the technique, their own expression will produce one day a technique which is life, which is art.

But we need beautiful text-books to help us. Our text books are extremely uninteresting. Let us imagine, instead of a text-book with a few sketches of cocks and crows, we have text-books with beautiful pictures, full of colour; such text-books would appeal to the young people, and they would want to study them. Instead of asking you to bring them pictures from town, your children would find them in the text-book. You can even imagine a child in the Second Form wanting to read the text-book of the Fifth Form, because it is so beautiful.

How little have the illustrations of our text-books to do with life as we know it! They usually do not draw Indian children in Indian text books, but auburn-haired European children. Let the children know life as they are accustomed to seeing it around them. Even in embroidery and needlework for Indian children let them see Indian designs.

In India a primary need is that the home should be a place of beauty. In the Madras Museum you will see the kitchen vessels, the lamps, that our grandfathers and grandmothers used in their houses. They had far better taste than we have. The house must be made beautiful, and the school must become one with the home, so that the children will grow up in the spirit of beauty, in the spirit of art, in the spirit of creative freedom ; not the creativeness of an ordinary mortal but the creativeness of God.

One important thing is the way we clothe our children. I do not think it suits Indian children to dress in frocks and trousers. You cannot imagine an English family always dressing their children in Indian garments.

We must stress gracefulness of living. We have a tradition of the highest culture. Our children must express this exquisite culture in beautiful manners, in gracious speech. It is not enough to say, " You must be good. You must not tell lies." We cannot learn these things in sentences. We have to learn these things in life. They can only be taught by the example of teachers and parents.

That is why I think that everyone who is a teacher has a work in life that is most blessed, most precious, most wonderful, a magnificent responsibility. The future of the world really remains in the hands of the teachers. As teachers we can do much, but the less we do it in the form of teaching, and the more we do it in the form of example through joy and pleasure and play, the happier will the atmosphere of the classes be and the more the children will learn.

Art, I feel, is the true backbone of education. With a real study of art, we will once more bring into existence the true purpose of education, to help young people to grow into splendid citizens.

I do not underrate degrees; but they are not enough by themselves. We want character. We want great men and great women. We want to see every child who has come to us as naughty, unmanageable, "impossible," become charming, become possible. If a child is naughty and great, we must bring out the greatness. Some of the greatest men and women have been thought to be the naughtiest children. At a certain age naughtiness is part

of life. We can help such children to become great citizens of our country.

We must not forget the true spirit of our country. We must know our homes, the State in which we live, our arts, our cultures, our poetry, music, dance. Only when we are plunged into the spirit of our own country do we really bring back the true culture which has no nationality whatsover. All this we can do if we can stress the creative spirit which is as much a part of education as it is of art.

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